



Earth & Spirit Council

Signed by
Dr. Stebbins
3 Feb'00

Testimony on Behalf of the Earth and Spirit Council Board Presented by Dr. Sarah Stebbins, Board President February 3, 2000 Holiday Inn at the Airport, Portland Oregon

Good afternoon! I am Dr. Sarah Stebbins, President of the Earth and Spirit Council. I am pleased to offer my comments on behalf of our board on both the Federal Caucus' "All H-Paper" and the US Army Corps of Engineers' Draft Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Mitigation Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement. The studies are quite voluminous, and we may wish to offer additional written comments after we have had a chance to digest the reports more fully. However, we wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to provide comment during this public meeting.

Since Earth and Spirit is not your traditional "stakeholder group" that regularly tracks and addresses Columbia and Snake River salmon recovery issues, I would like to take just a moment to explain who we are and why we are concerned about this issue.

We are a non-profit, educational, non-sectarian organization of religious, spiritual leaders and environmentally concerned individuals who are interested in **re-awakening humanity's spiritual connection with the earth and in engaging ourselves and others in earth conscious living.** Formed in 1991 from commitment evolving from two national conferences in Seattle and Portland, the Earth and Spirit Council is the most diverse interfaith organization in the Northwest and, perhaps, the United States. The core belief of the Earth and Spirit Council is: **life's spiritual dimension, more than anything else, has the greatest potential for meeting the challenge of healing the damaged earth and calling humanity into a new relationship with the natural order.**

We have been following the salmon recovery debate for some time and are encouraged by, what we perceive is, a greater level of acceptance for

including a spiritual perspective in the discussion about the future of the Columbia and Snake River ecosystem.

The complex issues addressed in the "All-H Paper" and the Draft EIS contain the issue's important biological, economic, engineering and political dimensions. What is missing is the spiritual dimension. This perspective cannot be captured in cost-benefit analyses, probability modeling exercises, PIT tag tests or engineering studies.

Appendix N of the Draft EIS correctly notes that Native Americans in particular believe that "there is a close physical and spiritual interrelationship between humans and nature.....humans are not superior to the animals and other aspects of nature but, rather, views human existence as an integral part of the natural and spiritual world".

It is true that this view is most closely associated with indigenous traditions. However, we know that this perspective is rapidly being adopted by other faith traditions, as well. Each year, during the week of Earth Day, the Earth and Spirit Council sponsors a major event in Portland called the Interfaith Conference and Celebration for the Earth. This very popular event brings together leaders from all of the world's great religious traditions to explore and share what each tradition brings to the subject of environment and spirituality. Through these annual conferences and celebrations we find that to a large extent, while specific terminology may differ from one religious tradition to the next, the "sacred interdependence of all things" is a common belief among all faiths.

As an example, the board members of the Earth and Spirit Council represent many different faith traditions. The richness of this diversity enhances our work and makes for lively discussions at board meetings! However, we have found unanimous agreement in these principles:

Life is sacred

The Spirit of God [however He or She is defined.....] exists in all of life's forms

The interdependencies of nature are sacrosanct

Critical harm to one element of the ecosystem threatens critical harm to the whole

These principles shape our belief that the Columbia and Snake River watersheds should be viewed and treated as a sacred, shared ecosystem that can reveal Spirit to all.

We, therefore, wish to make the following comments and recommendations:

1. We support the Federal Caucus' 5 goals for a regional fish recovery plan listed in the "All-H Paper". They are: conserve species, conserve ecosystems, assure Tribal fishing rights, balance the needs of other species and minimize adverse effects on humans. We are particularly pleased that the "All H Paper" clarifies the ultimate goal: **species recovery and long term survival** rather than avoiding extinction of threatened or endangered species. We categorically reject the misguided idea that preserving a small number of salmon or steelhead, identified as "museum pieces" for each Evolutionary Significant Unit [ESU], is sufficient. While the Endangered Species Act focuses on avoiding extinction, our treaty obligations with the Columbia Basin Tribes and our legal obligations under the Clean Water Act, Northwest Power Act, and Pacific Salmon Treaty require that we adopt **full species recovery as our region's goal**.

We also agree that reaching this goal means conserving the ecosystems upon which the salmon and steelhead depend. Spawning, breeding and migratory habitat must be addressed.

2. We believe that the region should look for a comprehensive solution. There are no "silver bullets" and no single action will be sufficient. In the same way the ecosystem is composed of interconnected, interdependent parts, so too must the solution address all of the interconnected and interdependent parts of the problem. We believe that significant improvements will need to be made in: Habitat, Hatcheries, Harvest and Hydropower. We know that lifestyle and land use practices in urban areas like Portland and Vancouver must be addressed. We can not expect people in the upper Columbia River Basin to make all the sacrifices when activities and lifestyles of those down river also contribute to the problem.

3. We believe that removing the four lower Snake River dams are part of this comprehensive solution.

We wish the scientific evidence suggested otherwise because we know dam removal will have an adverse impact on individuals and communities up river from the Tri-Cities. There is a dependence on the river for navigation and, in some instances, irrigation. Removing the dams will require well designed "transition programs" to alleviate the inevitable economic impact.

More recent data suggests that some salmon are returning in higher numbers, including those that must navigate all eight main stem dams. While we view this news as encouraging, we also know that these increased numbers are due to improved ocean conditions rather than to specific "technical fixes" to the dams themselves.

Should dam removal be rejected, we fear that the region will be forced to adopt very stringent, almost draconian, actions to compensate for the continued dam related salmon losses. We know there is little political support for dam removal in the region. We, however, fear that any species recovery option that does not include dam removal will have a **more severe impact on human populations**. By not acting now, we would simply delay the difficult political decisions for a few more years and make salmon recovery even more challenging to achieve.

4. We believe that our region's ability to preserve its low cost hydropower from the Columbia River basin is linked closely to our success in saving the fish and wildlife that depend on that river.

Our region enjoys the benefits of some of the least expensive power in the nation. So far, we have been able to justify this favored status to the rest of the nation. We have warded off threats from other regions who believe they should share the benefits of this low cost resource or that we should all pay higher market rates to "level the playing field." Part of our success is due to demonstrating to the rest of the nation that the region has supported funding for additional "public purposes".

"Public Purposes" or "value added" has meant different things at different times. Earlier in our history, it meant providing electricity and irrigation the rural areas of our region. It also meant dissolving the monopolies of the

various 'power trusts' and providing an "economic yardstick" through the creation of consumer owned public utilities against which the performance of investor owned utilities was [is] measured. Later, it meant providing the power necessary to build battleships, bombers and the atomic bomb which ended the war.

Presently, the primary test of our region's ability to defend our low cost hydropower will **be measured by how well we address the salmon recovery issue**. On this point, we agree with Governor John Kitzhaber when he warned: **"if the Northwest does not propose a regional solution for fish and power, these issues will be decided for us."** Indeed, there are well organized groups like the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition, waiting for us to adopt half-hearted technical solutions that are insufficient. We strongly urge you and our regional leaders to take the broader and longer-term perspective **demonstrated by Governor Kitzhaber's leadership on this issue**.

In closing, I wish to say that as a management consultant who works with organizations challenged by fast paced change, I am familiar with the fear, resistance and chaos that is associated with change. I also know that, in our society, the only constant **IS** change. The old adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" has given way to a newer version "if it ain't broke, it's probably obsolete".

These dams are now obsolete. Removing them constitutes a change of the highest magnitude and will require **courage, integrity, collaboration and continuous open dialog** to dispel fears and create solutions. I believe in the collective wisdom and intelligence of this region to compassionately and effectively manage the impact of the changes, removing the dams will produce.

Earth and Spirit Council encourages you to consider the sacred nature of the Columbia and Snake River watershed. Following our recommendations, including dam removal, will fully reflect the vision of Earth and Spirit: **Living in Kinship with Nature and all of Creation**.

I thank you again for this opportunity to present our views.



The Earth & Spirit Council

Questions and Answers

What is the E&S Council? The Earth & Spirit Council is a non-profit, non-sectarian membership organization of environmental and spiritual leaders, activists, and concerned members of our community who are interested in re-establishing the spiritual connection to the Earth and its natural rhythms. At the heart of the Earth & Spirit Council is the belief that the spiritual dimension of life offers the greatest reservoir of power, imagination, and courage for meeting the challenge of the damaged Earth, and calling humanity into a new relationship with the natural order.

Where is it located? The Earth & Spirit Council office is located at 6200 SW Virginia, Suite 210, Portland, OR 97201. **The mailing address is:** PO Box 230411, Portland, OR 97281. FAX: (503) 244-8401. Phone: (503) 452-4483. E-mail: earthandspirit@juno.com.

What is its vision and its mission? The Earth & Spirit Council Vision is: Living in kinship with Nature and all of Creation. Its Mission is: To re-awaken our spiritual connection with the Earth and to engage ourselves and others in earth conscious living.

What is the history of the organization? The Earth & Spirit Council was formed in 1991 from the energy coming out of two national conferences in Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon. Originally a part of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Earth & Spirit formed its own Board of Directors in 1992. Earth & Spirit was formed in response to the felt need for an organization which incorporates spirituality with concerns for the Earth.

Who runs the organization? A volunteer board of directors is currently responsible for overall management of the organization. The board is a diverse inter-faith group of concerned citizens. Individuals are elected to the Board by other board members and serve for three years, with an option for re-election. Much of the work of Earth & Spirit is done by committees.

What are the committees? Board members and others form the education committee, nominating committee, administrative committee, political affairs committee, newsletter committee, development committee, and Earth Day committee. Task forces are also created from time to time to assist in specific projects. The Interfaith Coordinating Committee, composed of representatives from various faith and environmental groups, coordinates the Earth Day activities.

What makes The Earth & Spirit Council unique? The Earth & Spirit Council is the most diverse inter-faith organization in the Northwest, and perhaps in the United States. It is the only organization to unify all faiths around the issue of healing the planet. It provides an important bridge between the environmental and spiritual communities, between the Western and indigenous traditions, and among peoples of all faiths. It also provides important learning and healing experiences for people who are searching for a way to integrate their spirituality with the state of the Earth today.

What programs and services does The Earth & Spirit Council offer? Earth & Spirit sponsors conferences, workshops, classes, ceremonies, and celebrations which are in line with its mission. Major conferences have been held in 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, and 1998 featuring workshops with leading-edge thinkers such as Jack Ward Thomas, Eldridge Cleaver, Matthew Fox, Marcus Borg, Winona LaDuke, Malidoma Somé, Miriam McGillis, Rashmi Mayur, Paula Gunn Allen, Michael Cohen, Vickie Noble, Mary Manin Morrissey, and others. More than 7,000 people have attended events sponsored by The Earth & Spirit Council. Programs and services include:

- ▶ **Earth Day Interfaith Conference and Celebration:** an annual event designed to educate and enhance the connections between religious, environmental, and business communities.
- ▶ **Monthly educational programs:** including workshops on environmental topics for churches and spiritual communities.
- ▶ **The Natural Way:** a monthly workshop series which provides a unique opportunity to learn about caring for the Earth from indigenous spiritual leaders.
- ▶ **Programs in women's spirituality, and Men and Nature.**
- ▶ **A semi-annual highway cleanup.**
- ▶ **The Earth & Spirit Chorale:** an opportunity for people to sing for the Earth and about Spirit.
- ▶ **A speakers bureau** for organizations interested in learning more about Earth and Spirit, deep ecology, Native spirituality, and more.
- ▶ **Linking** environmental organizations and the religious/spiritual communities.

How many people does the organization serve? Over 7,000 people have attended Earth & Spirit Council activities; over 3,000 people read the newsletter regularly, and over 200 churches and organizations use The Earth & Spirit Council as a resource in one way or another.

How is the organization funded? The Earth & Spirit Council is currently funded through donations, memberships, an annual auction, and by monies from foundations.

Is it a membership organization? Yes. Membership categories are: Regular membership — \$20; Family membership — \$35; Sustaining — \$50; Patrons — \$100; and Lifetime membership — \$1,000.

What does The Earth & Spirit Council offer to the community? The Earth & Spirit Council is the only organization in the Pacific Northwest to emphasize a multi-cultural, interfaith, educational approach to healing the Earth. It offers Earth Day activities and other programs mentioned above. We also offer an annual family camp with activities for children, and periodic outdoor experiences. In addition, Earth & Spirit helps out organizations and individuals with similar goals by co-sponsoring events, providing technical and volunteer support, loaning materials, and advertising activities in our newsletter. Our newsletter, *Earth & Spirit*, is an important communication organ for the community, as it provides information on upcoming events and discussion of crucial issues.

Where can I get additional information? You can call the Earth & Spirit Council hotline (503) 452-4483 for more information, or talk to any board member.